Chapter 5.3

The Profession of Research Management and Administration in Nigeria

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Abstract

This chapter explains the evolution of Research Management and Administration (RMA) in Nigeria with its achievements and challenges arising from the participation of relevant stakeholders and current practitioners from 24 universities in Nigeria. The layout covers the prerequisites for RMA, its development, and its implementations. Nonetheless, the research shows that the non-professionalisation of RMA in Nigeria is not only a barrier but also a challenge to the emergence of a profession which can be resolved by the implementation of approved/not-approved career structures for RMA in Nigeria. Findings from a survey show that a tripartite group is involved in the present-day RMA. Moreover, submissions by participants show that in the next two decades, RMA is expected to attract both academic and administrative staff with leadership by academic staff. The research supported the hypothesis that academic staff is most suitable to pilot RMA, nonetheless, when core research assignments for academic staff increase shortly, RMA will most likely be directed by administrative staff.

Keywords: Research Management and Administration; RMA; professionalisation; Nigeria; professional levels; demographics; WARIMA; SARIMA

Research Ecosystem in Nigeria

The research landscape in Nigeria is expanding, however, with little or minimum impact engendered by inadequate funding, education, training, and research infrastructure (Odeyemi et al., 2019). The evolution of Research Management and Administration (RMA) in Nigeria is an attempt to improve on the inadequate research infrastructure, which has led to the establishment of dedicated offices for RMA in Nigeria (Aliyu et al., 2021).

To briefly recall the memory lane, RMA started in Nigeria with the development of a National Policy Document on Health Research Ethics that was meant to represent the Government and people of Nigeria in relation to how health research was to be conducted in Nigeria. This document is titled: *National Code of Health Research Ethics*.[1] The document was crafted in 2007 following a meeting held in Accra, Federal Republic of Ghana by the Ministers of Health of all the African continent. The document became a framework for the integration of ethics of health and other research in the national research framework for research institutions, teaching hospitals, and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the country. In the pre-Nigeria era, it is interesting to note that there was an RMA-related structure named the *West African Council of Medical Research* (WACMR), affiliated with the *Medical Research Council (MRC)* of the UK. When Nigeria came into being, WACMR translated to the *Nigeria Institute of Medical Research*.[2]

Currently, universities employ most RMA staff in Nigeria. Nevertheless, because RMA has no verifiable career structure in Nigeria and no certification, we cannot say we have staff that we can categorise as RMA staff, career-wise. However, universities and other institutions like teaching hospitals, research organisations, and NGOs employ RMAs but it is significant to note that most RMAs are not regulated or certified by Nigeria because there is no verifiable career structure and progression for the evolving profession. Meanwhile, the staff who are deployed, employed, or engaged in RMA are holders of a first degree from a plethora of diverse disciplines. However, some also hold Master's degrees and others use the opportunity of the present light schedules in the RMA to pursue PhD degrees. The difference between the ideal RMA and the evolving RMA are certification, regulation, and recognition as a profession by the law of government and institutions.

As in most African universities, Nigeria is still categorised among countries with more need for RMA structure and presence (Akindele & Kerridge, 2019). Presently, in Nigeria, according to the National University Commission (NUC) website,[3] there are 40 federal universities, 50 state universities, and 111 private universities.

Funding of research in Nigeria is provided by the Nigeria Government, foreign donors, NGOs, and individuals (Baro et al., 2017). The Nigeria Government funds research through Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund),[4] while foreign foundations and philanthropic bodies include (but are not limited to):

> 54gene, African Academy of Sciences, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation NY, Dangote Foundation, Family Health International (FHI), Fulbright, Global Blood Therapeutics Inc.,

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[1]See http://www.nhrec.net.
[2]See https://nimr.gov.ng/about-us-2/.
[3]See https://nuc.edu.ng.
[4]See https://tetfund.gov.ng/.

Grand Challenges, International Development Research Centre, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), Medical Research Council (MRC), National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), National Institute of Health (NIH), Pfizer Global Medical Grants, Population Reference Bureau, Inc., President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Royal Society of Science, UK, Silicon Valley Foundation, The Union for International Cancer Control, Tony Elumelu Foundation, UNICEF, USAID, Wellcome, World Bank, World Federation of Haemophilia (WFH), World Health Organization.

The ecosystem of RMA in Nigeria shows great promise, hence the implementation of more RMA activities and involvement is expected to affect Nigeria research institutions positively. One critical focus of all public and private institutions is the improvement of web presence, which was tested for compliance with RMA success parameters (Akindele & Kerridge, 2019). Research success in Health, Social Science, Engineering, and other fields, depends on the viability and involvement of RMA offices in institutions in Nigeria (Aliyu et al., 2021).

Evolution of RMA in Nigeria

The Nigerian market is not yet a place where RMA is currently a profession (Aliyu et al., 2021). Non-professionals are employed and are informally trained to fit into the job descriptions that are supposed to be taken on by experienced and well-certificated RMA professionals. The current crops of staff taking on RMA job descriptions are professionally uncertificated, unrecognised, and unregulated.

In most universities, RMAs are mostly employed as second-fiddle core administrative staff while some are first-class administrative staff. In such places, the RMAs are housed in the Executive Cadre of the administrative structure of the university. They could be named 'Executive Officers' on level 7 and they have the opportunity to progress to become 'Chief Executive Officers' on level 13. By virtue of luck or an act of commission or omission, some core administrative staff at the rank of Administrative Officer on level 8 to the rank of Deputy Registrar on level 14 find themselves doing RMA. Nevertheless, there are some staff designated as project officers that are doing RMA. Moreover, other staff that are employed by individual research projects as RMA Managers are named *Research Assistants* (RA) while very few are named *Consultants*. If we go by the tags put on RMA by the unimplemented career structure in some institutions, we propose a generic structure with suggested qualifications in Table 5.3.1.

Table 5.3.1 is the structure of the proposed RMA Career in Nigeria by the author with a minimum academic qualification of a Bachelor's degree and a maximum of a Master's degree. Nevertheless, all cadre of staff are expected to belong to at least one of the existing professional organisations in or outside the sub-region: for example West African Research Management Association (WARIMA)[5]; South African Research Management Association (SARIMA)[6]; National Council of University

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[5]See https://warima.org/.
[6]See https://www.sarima.co.za/.

Table 5.3.1.   Structure of Proposed RMA Career in Nigeria.

Level	Position	Responsibility	Minimum Qualification
15	Director (RMA)	Act as the Chief Research Superintendent for the institution to provide planned direction in support of RMA	Master's degree in any field.
14	Deputy Director (RMA)	Provide administrative leadership to cover the plethora of RMA portfolios in support of the Director (RMA) and the RMA Department at large	Master's degree in any field.
13	Chief of Research (RMA)	Provide intermediate administrative leadership in support of the Deputy Director (RMA) and the entire RMA Department	Master's degree in any field.
12	Senior Assistant Chief of Research (RMA)	Provide organisational support to solving recurrent problems in the preparation, submission and execution of research from start-up to close-out	Bachelor's degree in any field.
10	Principal Research Manager (RMA)	Support the Senior Assistant Chief of Research (RMA) to provide organizational support to solve recurrent problems in the preparation, submission and execution of research from start-up to close-out	Bachelor's degree in any field.
09	Principal Assistant Research Manager (RMA)	Coordinate Departmental and Principal Investigators' processes of preparation, submission and execution of research from start-up to close-out	Bachelor's degree in any field.
08	Senior Research Manager (RMA)	Responsible to the Principal Assistant Research Manager (RMA) in completing specific tasks of pre-award and post-award processes	Bachelor's degree in any field.
07	Research Manager (RMA)	Provide day-to-day support for specific Principal Investigators in Pre and Post Award RMA	Bachelor's degree in any field.

Research Administrators (NCURA)[7]; Society for Research Administration International (SRAI)[8]; and Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA).[9]

It is important to note that whenever academic staff are appointed or deployed as RMA Managers in universities, they are given leadership designations like Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Directors of Research Management Office, Coordinators of Research, Director of Research and Innovation, Executive Director of the Central Office of Research, and so on. Whereas, the supposedly RMA professional staff that are non-academic/non-teaching staff are given more junior nomenclatures and positions that reflect their services in support of RMA – because of unimplemented career structures.

Current Community of RMA in Nigeria

In respect of the presence of a national professional association for RMA, Nigeria has not established a formal network yet. For this reason, RMAs belong to other associations, for example, WARIMA, SARIMA, NCURA, or SRAI. It is important to note that even the few RMAs that belong to the WARIMA are not consistent financially in their membership and renewal of their membership financially, annually and regularly. Also, the same goes for membership of SARIMA, NCURA, and SRAI whose memberships are problematic because Nigerian members would need to renew their membership with foreign currencies – a heavy financial burden for any Nigerian paid employee.

There is, however, an informal community for RMA practitioners which is a WhatsApp group for 'Directors R & D/TETFUND Directors R & D' consisting of about 74 individuals from various universities in Nigeria. It is important to note that all RMA staff on this WhatsApp group are core universities' academic staff with research-related nomenclatures. Moreover, as there are about 200 universities in Nigeria and the WhatsApp group only has 74 members we can see that the RMA associational community in Nigeria is far from pervasive. Unfortunately, there is no non-academic/non-teaching RMA personnel on that platform because it is a closed group association only for Directors of Research and Development, linked to TETFUND.

Demographics

In order to assess the demographics of RMAs in Nigeria, some questions from the RAAAP-3 questionnaire (Fischer et al., 2022) were adapted, this was needed as the main survey only elicited seven responses from Nigeria. The national survey undertaken by the author received 30 responses from 24 universities across the 6 geo-political zone in Nigeria viz: 63%, South-West; 10%, South-South; 7%, North-West; 7%, South-East; 3%, North-Central; and 3% North-East.

The academic qualifications of the participants are as follows: PhD: 40%, MSc: 34%, MPH: 10%, BSc: 10%, FWACP: 3%, and MMP: 3%. The percentage breakdown of the various academic background categorisations among the participants are as follows: Pure and Applied Sciences, (43%), Social Sciences (20%), Medical Sciences (17%), Agricultural Science (7%), Arts (7%), and Engineering (7%).

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[7]See https://www.ncura.edu/.
[8]See https://www.srainternational.org/.
[9]See https://arma.ac.uk/.

There were three age ranges in the instrument. The ranges and percentages were as follows: 41–60 age range, 67%; 25–40 age range, 30%; 61–80 age range, 3%.

Regarding years of experience in RMA, 43% of the participants have 3–5 years, 30% have 0–2 years, and 13% have over 10 years. Among the participants, 40% were leaders in research (heads of offices, responsible for leading strategic functions); 37% were managers, (subordinate to a leader in research but responsible to coordinate a team in a functional specific area); 17% were operational staff (responsible for undertaking specific tasks), while 7% were assistants (who provide support for leader, manager or operational staff).

In response to the question of whether or not RMA is a profession in Nigeria, 50% affirmed that it was, 23% disagreed, while 24% were uncertain. Moreover, 48% submitted that RMA was without a career structure in Nigeria, 33% were hesitant, while 20% opined that RMA has a career structure in Nigeria. In relation to RMA having career structure and the implementation in Nigeria in the next two decades, 70% of participants submitted that it will have a career structure, while 10% opined that it will not. However, 20% were indifferent to the item.

Furthermore, the majority of participants (84%) submitted that mixture of academic, administrative, and ad-hoc staff is likely to be in RMA, once the profession is recognised and a qualification pathway properly set/defined. This group of respondents supported the assertion that for optimal success for the multifaceted and multidisciplinary nature of RMA, the three categories of staff will definitely function in a professionalised RMA.

With regards to the leadership of RMA in Nigeria, 47% of participants submitted that academic staff will lead RMA. To buttress this submission, participants believed that academic staff possessed more understanding of research (related) activities even though they need more training to boost their administrative capabilities to run and support research management activities. Moreover, participants believed that academic staff are trained to develop and discover research problems, which suggests that, if academic staff lead RMA units and services, the leadership could be more impactful. Furthermore, 47% of participants believed that RMA should have both academic and administrative components even though the participants submitted that academic staff were more likely to handle the tasks more competently. Conversely, only 7% submitted that administrative staff will lead RMA in Nigeria. However, 47% opined that both academic and administrative staff will lead RMA in Nigeria.

The Future of RMA in Nigeria

The future of RMA in Nigeria is expected to be propitious. The assumption hinges on the fact that there is already a plethora of RMA activities and staff. This shows that even though Nigeria might not currently show full evidence of RMA as a profession, Nigerian research institutions are already working towards making RMA a full-fledged profession. There is evidence of approved career structure for RMA staff in some institutions in Nigeria even though they have not been operationalised. For instance, at the University of Ibadan, the last but one approved career structure made provision for the entry title into RMA as 'Research Administrator' with the basic qualification of Higher National Diploma Certificate (HND) or a Bachelor Degree in Education or Science. Such RMA staff undertake clerical and administrative responsibilities in support of unit's research programs which may include the organisation of pre-award and/or post-award procedures as well as collection, distribution, and filing of Request for Applications (RFAs), Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) proposals and

associated papers. Moreover, in recent times, there are improved training and retraining opportunities on research funding and support especially from international grantors in some universities in Nigeria. Such training grants include NIH G11[10] and the UASP Fellowship and Alumni grants of IREX[11] and Carnegie Corporation of NY.[12] This underscores the fact that more researchers are applying for international grants that require better compliance with international RMA infrastructure, which can only become a reality in the full implementation of the career structure(s) of RMA in Nigeria. Furthermore, in recent years, TETFUND in Nigeria has committed a large amount of its funds to the establishment of Research and Innovation Offices to enable its vision and mandate to establish globally compliant RMA infrastructures.

Looking critically into the past and the present of RMA, on the one hand, the profession might end up becoming a core academic staff profession in Nigeria, because most academic staff engaged in RMA in universities/research institutions see it as prestigious and exclusive positions that could only be more effectively piloted by the academic staff. On the other hand, some administrative staff see RMA as consisting purely of administrative activities which will release the core academic staff to do justice to their core competencies of intra/inter disciplines research or intra and inter disciplines research. Arising from the explanations recapped above, we can postulate that, in the next two decades, RMA can be predicted to be a profession appealing to both academic and administrative staff in Nigeria. In our opinion, it appears that RMA in Nigeria will lean more towards academic staff until academic staff are willing to let go of professional administrative duties, and administrative staff are willing to take on administrative duties that have a blend with academic assignments.

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[10]See https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/g11-sample-applications-and-opportunity-foreign-grant-administrators.

[11]See https://www.irex.org/project/university-administration-support-program-uasp.

[12]See https://www.carnegie.org/grants/.